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### I didn't say that!

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**Title:** *I didn't say that!*: Uses of SAY in mediation discourse

**Short title:** I didn't say that!

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*I didn't say that!:* Uses of SAY in  
mediation discourse

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**Abstract**

While several taxonomies of meta-discourse exist, none clearly explains speakers' strategies in mediation. Mediators, however, seem to rely a lot on meta-discourse to manage the argument while preserving their neutrality. This article proposes corpus analyses to detect mediation participants' discourse strategies and highlight the role and function of a meta-discourse element – the verb 'to say'. This paper is a first step towards the elaboration of a taxonomy for the analysis of argumentative meta-discourse, and brings new insights in meta-discourse in argumentative dialogues and mediation discourse in general.

**Keywords**

Argumentative discourse, dispute mediation, discourse analysis, Inference Anchoring Theory, meta-discourse

## Authors' biographies

**Mathilde Janier** is a PhD student at the Centre for Argument Technology, University of Dundee, UK. Her main research interests are discourse in dispute mediation and argumentative discourse in general; she has collaborated on projects on Argument Mining and discourse processing. She is the author of an article published in the *Argumentation* journal, which proposes a method for fine-grained analyses of mediation discourse in order to highlight the argumentative techniques of mediators. She has also put together the first open corpus of mediation dialogues and has developed a dialogue game for mediation training.

**Chris Reed** is Professor of Computer Science and Philosophy at the University of Dundee in Scotland, where he heads the Centre for Argument Technology. Chris has been working at the overlap between argumentation theory and artificial intelligence for over twenty years, has won over £5.6m of funding from RCUK, government and commercial sources and has over 150 peer-reviewed papers in the area including five books. He has also been instrumental in the development of the Argument Interchange Format, an international standard for computational work in the area; he is spearheading the major engineering effort behind the Argument Web and he was a founding editor of the *Journal of Argument & Computation*.

## Introduction

Civil case mediation is a dispute resolution process that allows people to resolve their dispute with the help of third-neutrals, the mediators, in a quicker, cheaper and less stressful manner than court trials. As a consequence, mediation is becoming more and more popular and governments and communities make efforts to implement this procedure as an alternative to traditional litigation. For example, mediation is now mandatory for some civil cases (in particular divorces) in many countries. Knowing how this process works and understanding the nature and characteristics of its discourse in particular are crucial for providing mediation professionals with valuable insights as to what are the best strategies to resolve a dispute. The principle of confidentiality, which is dear to disputants and mediators, however makes it hard to obtain data to study mediation discourse. Some works of research have nevertheless been carried out, from discourse and communication studies (e.g. (Stokoe, 2012, Vasilyeva, 2010)) to conflict resolution studies (e.g. (Jacobs and Aakhus, 2002, Garcia, 2000, Stokoe and Hepburn, 2005, Smithson et al., 2015)) and argumentation theory (e.g. (Greco Morasso, 2011)) that have advanced our understanding of the mediation process and the mediators' role in particular. Moreover, a freely available corpus of analyses of mediation dialogues, the Dispute Mediation Corpus (DMC), has been released to facilitate the sharing of data and knowledge between academics (Janier and Reed, 2016). The DMC<sup>1</sup> currently comprises around 20,000 words analysed in over 250 argument maps that have been used to explore the relationship between dialogical and argument structures in mediation interactions. This corpus therefore offers a valuable and unique dataset for the investigation of the dynamics of mediation dialogues. Most works interested in mediation discourse have focused their investigation on the mediators' role and their strategies for respecting the principle of neutrality while, at the same, efficiently leading disputants towards the resolution of their conflict (Greco Morasso, 2008, Jacobs and Aakhus, 2002, Jacobs, 2002).

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<sup>1</sup> Available at [arg.tech/DMC](http://arg.tech/DMC)

These works have shown that mediators subtly take part in the argument mainly by leading the discussions and reacting to impasses that block the good progression of the parties' argument (Aakhus, 2003). As a result, mediators' contributions to the discussions mainly shape and direct the discussions. As argued by Greco Morasso mediators play a paradoxical role, since they are in charge of the argument but they must stay neutral at the same time (Greco Morasso, 2011, p 29). A means to understand how mediators manage to play this role is therefore necessary to help discover how they control the dynamics of mediation discussions. Exploring meta-discourse (i.e. discourse about discourse) hence seems to be a good step towards an account of this argumentative characteristic.

Speakers talking about the discussion in which they are involved creates a discussion about the discussion. This theme has been studied in different communicative contexts (e.g. political discourse (Martínez Guillem, 2009), academic discourse (Ädel, 2010) or dialogues (Schiffrin, 1980)) and is known as meta-discourse or meta-talk (Schiffrin, 1980), in the case of spoken discourse. Meta-discourse is usually defined as words or phrases that do not add information at a propositional level but allow for organizing, clarifying or reacting to a message (Vande Kopple, 1985). Most works have limited themselves to the investigation of meta-discourse to understand its role for organizing a discourse; also, written communication has been privileged over spoken communication; and the relation between meta-discourse and argumentation has little been highlighted. Moreover, despite works on mediation discourse that acknowledge the mediators' role in shaping the discussion and that seek to explain their strategies to preserve their neutrality with respect to disputants and their standpoints, none has, to the best of our knowledge, investigated the use of meta-discourse in mediation dialogues. If mediators are in charge of the content and direction of a discussion, their contributions must consist of particular phrases that refer to the discussion, which, in the literature, is the very definition of meta-discourse; the relationship between references to the on-going discussion, namely meta-discourse, and mediation argumentative strategies must therefore be investigated. This article proposes a first step towards such an account of

argumentative meta-discourse in mediation through corpus analyses to detect mediation participants' discursive strategies and highlight the role and function of a commonly used meta-discourse verb in mediation: SAY. For this, a theoretical framework that explains how arguments are produced in mediation dialogues is needed. To our knowledge, Inference Anchoring Theory (IAT) (Budzynska and Reed, 2011) is the only analytical tool that helps showing how dialogical dynamics create arguments. Our investigation of mediation discourse will therefore rely on IAT to explore the relationships between dialogues, arguments and meta-discourse.

### *Motivation*

Let's take two short dialogues inside a mediation session. These excerpts are taken from the transcript of a mock-mediation where the disputants, Sean and Nancy, try to resolve their workplace discrepancies with the help of two mediators, Kelly and Melissa.

(1) a. Kelly Tansik: *Sean, **I just want to go back. A couple of sentences ago, you mentioned** 'psych notes' and **you said** that people have different personalities?*

b. Sean McNeil: *Yes, and part of it has to do with, and **I hate to bring this up** because I know **you're going to get all over me**, the way men and women think. Men and women just think differently.*

(2) a. Melissa Myer: *Sean, **you said** you don't want to have to go back to work just in case some hard feelings are brought up or something. Could you meet for 10 minutes in the cafeteria after shift twice a month?*

b. Sean McNeil: *If it's necessary.*



In Example 1, talk about talk is emphasized in bold letters. “I just want to go back” and “A couple of sentences ago” refer to something that happened earlier in the dialogue; “you mentioned” and “you said” refer to something that the interlocutor said in the dialogue; “I hate to bring this up” previews something that will be mentioned while “you’re going to get all over me” anticipates the interlocutors’ reaction to the speaker’s coming talk. Example 1 is a good example of the widespread presence of meta-talk in mediation dialogue, and shows that it does have a close relation to argumentation. In the example, two of the meta-talk elements are clearly parts of an argument; see the connector ‘because’ between “I hate to bring this up” and “you’re going to get all over me”: the speaker argues not about facts or opinions but about the discussion itself. Most importantly, this argument has been triggered by the mediator’s question, which contains the meta-talk element SAY. In Example 2, the mediator also uses “you said” and then asks a question to Sean to see if he would be ready to meet his colleague Nancy after work twice a month to resolve their problems at work. It is important to note that Melissa does not clearly argue in favour of such an arrangement since she is only asking question; however, it is easy to reconstruct her reasoning: if Sean does not want to go back to work after a heated conversation with his colleague, then it may be a good idea for Sean and Nancy to meet after their work shift.

As we will see in Section *Related work*, whilst many of the meta-talk elements in Example 1 and 2, individually, have been studied in several works on meta-discourse, one key issue has, to our knowledge, never been explored: to what extent does meta-talk play a specific role in overtly argumentative discourse, and in argumentation in a dialogical context in particular? This is the question that will be tackled here, where we will explore the functions of a meta-talk element that is common to both examples: the verb ‘to say’. In these dialogues, indeed, the mediators use SAY but have different strategies: while the first use, in a question, has led the party to argue, the second one, followed by a question, has allowed the mediator to ask the party if he agreed with a proposed arrangement. This paper

aims therefore at explaining the relationship between uses of this verb in mediation discourse and the argumentative, dialogical and rhetorical strategies of speakers<sup>2</sup>. When SAY is used with the pronouns ‘I’ and ‘you’ (as subjects), it is clear that the speaker makes a reference to the discussion participants, i.e. the speaker herself and the interlocutors. Also, uses of SAY refer to past discussion when used in the past tense, or to the current talk if used in the present tense. As a consequence, this verb designates aspects of language and carries a meta-discursive role. The verb ‘to say’ has been chosen among the many other speech verbs (such as ‘to tell’, ‘to mention’ or ‘to claim’) for two reasons: its high frequency in the Dispute Mediation Corpus, and the fact that it is not a speech act verb (Searle and Vanderveken, 1985), which therefore presents an additional challenge because the speakers’ communicative intentions when using SAY are not completely clear (see Section *The verb ‘to say’* for more details). Additionally, SAY is considered as one of the most typical discourse reflexive verbs, that is, a verb, which refers to discourse itself (Ädel and Mauranen, 2010; Mauranen, 2010).

Meta-discourse has been the focus of discourse studies, most of the time interested in written text. Meta-talk in spoken communication has mainly been studied in contexts with low interaction between speakers and listeners such as university lectures (Ädel, 2010, Zare and Tavakoli, 2016) and TED talks (Correia et al., 2014). In (Crismore, 2004), the author shows that meta-discourse is an essential part of the effectiveness of persuasion, however, this work is based only on monological discourse. Exploring meta-discourse in mediation, a highly interactive dialogical context where argumentation plays a crucial role, is therefore a novel and particularly demanding challenge. This paper will extend knowledge in meta-discourse in general, but will also bring new insights as to how argumentation is performed and managed

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<sup>2</sup> Other verbs that refer to the discursive activity (such as ‘mention’ in Example 1) may as well play a role in the argumentation, however, we focus our study on the verb ‘to say’ because of its higher frequency in our corpus of mediation dialogues.

by mediators. This will bring advances for the study of mediation discourse, which is necessary to understand this increasingly popular process.

### *Related work*

Meta-discourse is defined as discourse that refers to discourse itself or, more precisely, as “reflexive linguistic expressions referring to the evolving discourse itself or its linguistic form, including references to the writer-speaker qua writer-speaker and the (imagined or actual) audience qua audience of the current discourse” (Ädel, 2010, p. 75); therefore the reflexivity of language is what is at stake when studying meta-discourse (Ädel, 2010; Mauranen, 2010). As argued e.g. in (Martínez Guillem, 2009), studying meta-discourse is fundamental to understand discourse in general. It is however one of the hardest elements to account for given that it “is both about discourse and part of it” (Martínez Guillem, 2009, p. 731). The task is even trickier when oral communication is considered, where people can constantly refer to the other discussants’ words, sentences and arguments throughout a dialogue. Meta-discourse has been little studied within spoken language, and the few works where spoken communication is considered do not present us with highly interactive communication between different speakers (Ädel, 2010, Correia et al., 2014) (see Section *Motivation*). Most works (e.g. (Ädel, 2010)) nevertheless agree that meta-discourse has more functions in spoken than in written language.

As shown in (Schiffrin, 1980), there are many different meta-discursive elements, in particular in dialogical contexts. Talking about the talk that is occurring happens in every conversation and this can take various forms. Schiffrin’s study of meta-discourse in dialogical contexts allows for a first delineation of what meta-talk elements are. In this paper, Schiffrin defines how, where and why meta-talk occurs in a dialogue. First, meta-talk expressions can focus on one’s own talk or an interlocutor’s talk. For example, according to Schiffrin, “that’s my opinion” refers to the speaker’s talk – probably her previous statement; on the other hand, “what do you mean” refers to the co-discussant’s talk – the speaker is probably asking

him to repeat or elaborate on his previous statement. The author identified three indicators that all have talk itself as a common focus: metalinguistic referents (e.g., “the next point”, “let me say”), operators (e.g., “wrong”, “for example”) and verbs (e.g. “tell”, “define”). She then identified two types of meta-talk which are not necessarily independent from one another. Organisational elements regulate the discourse and evaluative elements serve to assess or react to the discourse. Organisational brackets open (initial brackets, such as “in other words”) or close (terminal brackets, such as “that was my point”) a space in which the speaker talks about the discourse. Evaluative brackets, on the other hand, are elements that allow the speaker to e.g. give her opinion about what has been said or to request for explanation (Schiffrin, 1980, p. 218). In addition, some evaluative brackets allow for anticipating an interlocutor’s talk. For instance, renewal brackets (more generally called reported speech or quoted talk (Stokoe and Edwards, 2007), e.g. “you say” or “as I said”), or expressions such as “don’t tell me that...”, “I hate to say this, but...” or “I don’t say...” give less chance to an interlocutor to challenge or criticise the statement that will follow. Despite an account of a large range of meta-talk elements, this typology has some drawbacks. First, the taxonomy itself does not allow for a clear demarcation between the different types of meta-talk. Meta-talk elements that can serve the organisation of the discourse often have an evaluative function when the focus is on the interlocutor’s discourse; for instance, note the difference when the phrase “that’s the point” refers to the speaker’s standpoint or her interlocutor’s: a speaker can use this phrase to punctuate her utterance (it then has an organisational function) or to react to her interlocutor’s utterance (evaluative function). Moreover, the same phrase can focus both on the speaker’s and her interlocutor’s talk: in that case the bracket is organisational and evaluative. Therefore, there is no clear distinction between organisational and evaluative brackets. Then, more generally, it is difficult to delimit what is meta-talk and what is simply talk, because speakers always refer to the discussion in which they are involved indefinitely. For example, when a speaker answers to a question, the response is

necessarily related to the question and, therefore, to the discourse in itself. Finally, it does not present a pragmatic account of meta-talk, therefore its argumentative function is barely considered.

In (Ädel, 2010), the author proposes another taxonomy of the functions of meta-discourse in written and spoken language. Her study concentrates on academic talk (lectures and student essays), which offers a rich environment for metadiscursive elements. Her taxonomy distinguishes between four main types of meta-discourse: metalinguistic comments, discourse organization, speech act labels and references to the audience. In (Ädel, 2012), she admits a drawback of her taxonomy, namely that a metalinguistic comment can have different functions, therefore an arbitrary choice into which the primary function is has to be made. Also, similarly to Schiffrin's, her taxonomy does not focus on argumentative functions of meta-talk, however, her category "speech act labels" contains the discourse function arguing which, intuitively would relate to the main aspect of our work here, i.e. the argumentative function of meta-discourse. In her study, this function needs to be clearly signalled, for example in an utterance like "I argue that" but, as we will see, clearly stating that we are about to argue is not the only way to effectively argue, nor is it the most common.

The biggest issue when studying meta-discourse, and this has been emphasised in most works (see in particular (Ädel and Mauranen, 2010)) is to precisely define the object of the investigation. The most common strand in the study of meta-discourse sees meta-discourse as a textual interaction and is usually named the interactive model (Ädel and Mauranen, 2010). This view of meta-discourse is primarily interested in the relationship that is created between a writer/speaker and their reader/audience; metadiscourse is principally studied through the exploration of discourse elements that organise and set up a discussion or a text. The second strand, the reflexive model (Ädel and Mauranen, 2010) sees metadiscourse as having more functions than simply referring to the on-going discourse. It is the view

that will be adopted in this paper: the function of SAY in argumentative discourse will be determined through close examinations of the context of each occurrence.

In sum, all the works presented in this section provide insightful information as to what meta-discourse is, and how to detect it. We consider Ädel's and Schiffrin's taxonomies to be particularly enlightening: Schiffrin offers a study of dialogical interactions and takes into account evaluative functions, which are closely related to argumentative functions, and Ädel's categories, although not exclusively fitted for dialogues, also contains elements (such as reformulating, arguing or clarifying) that are close to argumentation as well. Defining the role and function of the speech verb SAY in argumentative discourse, is the challenge taken up here. Our decision to focus on a dialogical context, coupled with mediation's specific interactional dynamics, where the mediator is in charge of the argument but must not take position, makes our task even trickier. Mediators' main task is to ensure a sound argumentative dialogue while, at the same time, staying neutral; their contributions to the discussion are therefore subtle. In particular, if they cannot argue, it is hard to detect their argumentative moves and relate them with meta-discursive moves. This, and the few indications provided by the literature – principally interested in monological or hardly interactional contexts – represent a challenge for our goal: laying the foundations for a taxonomy of meta-discourse in argumentative dialogues.

### *Meta-talk in mediation discourse*

In this section, we will show that SAY as meta-talk (or meta-discourse) is unusually common in mediation dialogues. Relying on Schiffrin's and Ädel's taxonomies, we will describe some examples of dialogues taken from the Dispute Mediation Corpus (hereafter DMC). We will then show that the two taxonomies fail to account for the argumentative function of the meta-discourse element SAY.

- (3) a. Eric: *I can leave at any time then if I want to?*  
 b. Mildred: *Yes you can, either of you can.*  
 c. But, **as I say**, *we hope that you will stay and we hope you will want to stay to talk through your differences that you can put right today.*

Example 3 is taken from the transcript of a mock-mediation for the resolution of a workplace conflict. The dispute involves two parties, Viv and her boss Eric, and two mediators, Mildred and George. This excerpt comes from the beginning of the mediation, when mediators explain how the session will unfold. In the example, Mildred uses the meta-talk element: “as I say”. According to Schifffrin, this self-repair acts both as an organisational bracket (she emphasises the fact that she already mentioned that) and as an evaluative bracket (she puts into relief her statement for Eric’s attention). In Ädel’s taxonomy, this meta-discourse element would fall in the category of *reviewing*: Mildred mentions something she already said. Both taxonomies agree on the fact that this meta-talk allows the speaker to refer to something that was already mentioned; they do not tell us however if the speaker is simply repeating a sentence, and in which case, why she does so. As we will see in Section *Methods*, a close analysis of this utterance and the broader context of the dialogue is therefore needed to understand why Mildred emphasized this.

Let’s consider Example 1 again. We have seen that this very short dialogue is filled with meta-discourse: ‘I just want to go back’, ‘a couple of sentences ago, you mentioned’, ‘you said...’, ‘I hate to bring this up’, ‘you’re going to get all over me’. First, Kelly proposes to go back to what Sean said earlier in the mediation (this would correspond to *reviewing* in Ädel’s taxonomy); then, Sean answers and also talks about the world of the discourse: he does not want to bring up, not a physical object – that would pertain to the ‘real world’ – but a thought, a sentence, an opinion, and anticipates his co-discussants’ reaction in this same discussion if he does ‘bring this up’: they will probably ‘get all over’ him, once again,

(probably) not physically but verbally. The question then is: how is it that, even by presenting so many meta-discursive elements, the speakers clearly make sense and have a reasonable and understandable discussion? In particular, look at Sean's move: he does not want to talk about something because he anticipates one of his interlocutors' (verbal) reaction. What is important here is that with two meta-discursive elements, a speaker is able to build an argument, which shows that meta-talk can have an argumentative function. Moreover, this argument has been triggered by the mediator's question which contains the verb 'to say'. An account of the relationship between the question and the argument that follows is therefore necessary to detect the argumentative strategy of the mediator when she used the meta-talk SAY.

These two examples show that SAY as meta-discourse is present in mediation dialogues but Schifffrin's and Ädel's taxonomies do not help in capturing its argumentative function. A method to elicit this function is given in the following section.

## Methods

The study of meta-talk presented here was carried out in two steps: first, a shallow linguistic analysis is performed, where the verb 'to say' is searched inside the DMC, currently containing over 20,000 words. Then, only uses with 'I' and 'you' as pronoun-subjects were taken into account. Finally, of these occurrences, we only considered those in the past tense and those in the present tense. As mentioned in Section *Motivation*, constraining our investigation to usages of the verb 'to say' to these pronouns and tenses is motivated by the fact that (i) these occurrences only designate the participants involved in the current discussion, and (ii) mediation is a dialogical context where speakers have to talk about the past (e.g. when parties explain the origin of the dispute) as well as the current situation (e.g. when the mediator summarises the session).

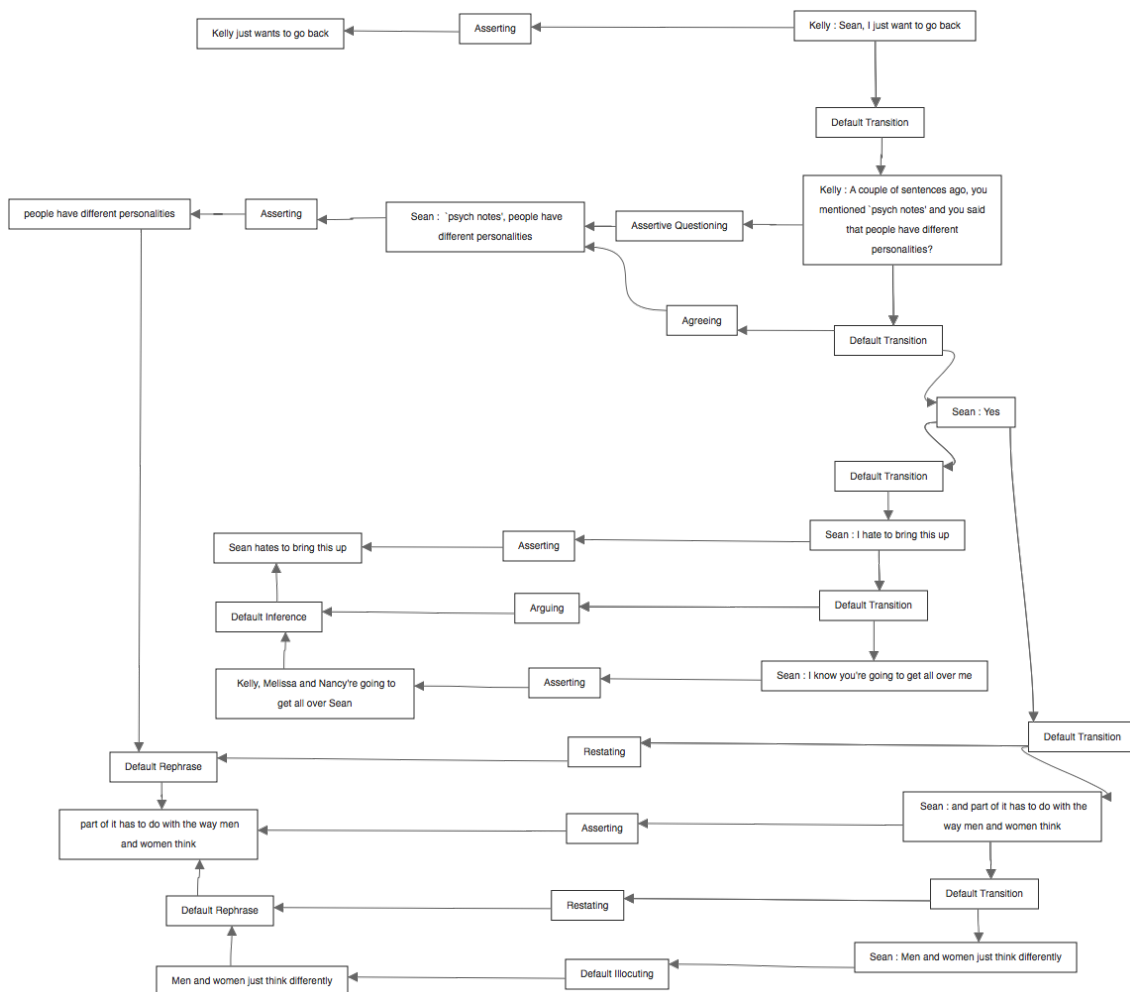


*Corpus analyses*

This study relies on corpus analyses of the Dispute Mediation Corpus (DMC). The raw material consists in transcripts (and excerpts of transcripts) of mediation sessions. Given the principle of confidentiality that reigns in mediation, few mediators provide transcripts of mediation, but transcripts of role-plays (or mock mediations) are sometimes provided by mediation centres and represent an easy way to obtain material for the study of mediation discourse. The examples presented throughout the paper come from such transcripts of real and mock mediations that have been obtained from peers' works, mediation centres and role-plays found on the internet. The excerpts have all been anonymised to respect confidentiality. More details on the DMC, and how it has been built, can be found in (Janier and Reed, 2016) .

Empirical data provided by the transcripts of mediation sessions are analysed using Inference Anchoring Theory (IAT) (Budzynska et al., 2013). This framework allows for the analysis of dialogical interactions in order to show the argumentative structures. The model is strongly grounded in argumentation theory, with the aim of identifying and describing inferential structures (i.e. the relationship premise/conclusion between contents). In comparison to written texts, in dialogues, arguments are not easily detected via explicit discourse markers such as 'because' or 'therefore' (Moens et al., 2007). According to IAT, arguments in dialogues can therefore only be extracted by taking into account the dialogical structure, that is the sequence of locutions in a discussion. By rendering the speakers' communicative acts explicit, argumentative structures are derived from the dialogical structures. Speakers' communicative intentions are represented through the analysis of the illocutionary forces (Austin, 1975, Searle and Vanderveken, 1985). IAT represents therefore a model where argumentative and dialogical structures can be elicited

and described. Let's take Example 1 again, and apply IAT, in Figure 1 below, to show how the model can be used to make explicit the argumentative, dialogical and illocutionary structures. For more legible figures, please consult them online<sup>3</sup>.



**Figure 1.** IAT analysis of Ex. 1, argument map #10782

<sup>3</sup> The IAT analyses presented throughout this paper are also stored online; please use the following url: [aifdb.org/argview/xxx](http://aifdb.org/argview/xxx) and replace xxx by the argument map identifier given in captions of figures. On the menu, choose Edit with OVA+ to access the full IAT analysis.

On the right-hand side of Figure 1, one can see the dialogical structure, with the speakers' locutions and the transitions between locutions which represent the dialogical relevance of moves, represented by Default Transition nodes (e.g. Sean answered "Yes" as a response to Kelly's utterance "A couple of sentences ago, you mentioned 'psych notes' and you said that people have different personalities"). Locutions have illocutionary connections which represent the speaker's communicative intention, e.g. Sean asserts that "Men and women just think differently". It is impossible, for some speech acts, to determine what the speaker's intention is without knowing what the speech act is responding to. For example, here, we know that, when he says "Yes", Sean agrees only because this is a response to Kelly's question "you said that people have different personalities?". Similarly, we can only affirm that Sean is arguing because of the relationship between his two locutions "I hate to bring this up" and "you're going to get all over me". Taken independently, these speech acts are merely claims, but, considered together, it is clear that they perform an illocutionary act: arguing. In this example, the discourse marker 'because' clearly signals argumentation, but in spoken communication explicit discourse markers of argumentation are relatively rare (Moens et al., 2007). Illocutionary connections form a structure (the illocutionary structure) where the communicative acts of speakers are represented, and where the relationship between them is elicited. The left-hand side of the figure represents the argumentative structure: the proposition *Sean hates to bring this up* is inferentially related to *Melissa, Nancy and Kelly are going to get all over Sean*; this is represented by Default Inference nodes. This means that the first proposition is the conclusion and it is supported by one premise, the following proposition. Argumentative structures can also elicit counter-argumentation, represented by Default Conflict nodes (when a proposition is in conflict with another, which is not the case in this example) and Rephrasing, that is, the relationship between propositions that have the same pragmatic meaning but may have a different linguistic surface (see (Konat et al., 2016) and Section *Restating* for more details and a clear definition of rephrase); rephrasing is represented by Default Rephrase nodes. In this example, *Men and women just think differently* is a

rephrase of *people have different personalities*. The figure also shows that IAT can handle a specificity of language: reported speech. The sentence “you said that people have different personalities?” is reporting a sentence that was previously uttered by another discussant. By unpacking the propositional content of the reported speech (on the left-hand side, i.e. the proposition) and the propositional content of the reporting speech (in the middle, i.e. Sean’s locution), IAT shows that reported speech has two contents: the main proposition: *people have different personalities*, and the reported locution: *Sean said that “people have different personalities”*. As we will see throughout this paper, this dialogical technique has several argumentative advantages. In this example, the reporting speech (i.e. Kelly’s locution) carries the assertive questioning force: Kelly is looking for Sean’s (dis-)agreement. As a response to this move, Sean answers “Yes”: he agrees. The agreement (which can only be considered as such because it follows an assertive question) targets the reported speech; this means that Sean agrees with the fact that he said such a thing. Sometimes, as we will see in the following sections, the agreement targets the propositional content: the speaker agrees with a proposition, not with the reported speech.

In sum, IAT allows unpacking speakers’ locutions and showing the interrelations between them (the dialogical structure); by then representing the illocutionary forces of locutions (e.g. asserting), as well as the ones that come from the interrelations between locutions (e.g. arguing), it is possible to reveal the illocutionary structure, and to derive the argumentative structure of the dialogue, that is, the relationships between propositional contents (inference or conflict for example). Patterns of dialogical moves create arguments, and several elements of the dialogical structure can play a single role in the argument structure. Moreover, some dialogical moves do not play a role in the argument at all. As a consequence, argumentative structures typically have fewer elements than dialogical structures. For example, in Figure 1, the dialogical structure contains 13 elements (7 locutions and 6 transitions between them) and the

argumentative structure contains 9 elements (one relation of inference and two relations of rephrase between 6 propositional contents).

This analysed example shows that IAT is well suited for the exploration and discovery of argument structures in dialogical contexts: some non-obvious characteristics of the dialogues are made explicit and show how arguments are constructed. Most importantly, we have demonstrated that IAT allows us to show the argumentative facet of meta-discourse and to relate it to discourse strategies, which Ädel's and Schiffrin's taxonomies fail to grasp. As we will see in more details in Section *Functions of SAY in mediation discourse*, the fine-grained analyses highlight three different -- though interrelated -- structures that allow to detect speakers' strategies. Strategies, therefore, can be identified on each of these levels: while argument structures (i.e. the relationships between propositions) reveal argumentative strategies and dialogical structures (i.e. the relationships between locutions) reveal dialogical strategies, the dynamics on the illocutionary structure level capture rhetorical strategies.

IAT has been applied on more than 200 excerpts of mediation discussions of varying length (Janier and Reed, 2016). The analyses have been saved in AIFdb Corpora, an online tool for storing argument analyses (Lawrence et al., 2015) realized in OVA+ (Janier et al., 2014b). OVA+ (Online Visualisation of Argument) is a web-based tool for IAT analyses. Table 1 summarizes the frequency of the annotation tags in DMC.

**Table 1.** Annotations in DMC.

Types of annotation	Occurrences
<b>Dialogical structure</b>	
Locutions	3,237
Transition nodes	2,518
Reported speech	248
<b>Illocutionary structure</b>	

Asserting	2476
Ironic asserting	4
Expressing	40
Offering	18
Pure questioning	192
Assertive questioning	147
Rhetorical questioning	53
Directive questioning	32
Pure challenging	23
Assertive challenging	7
Rhetorical challenging	7
Arguing	777
Explaining	72
Restating	297
Default illocuting	77
Agreeing	255
Disagreeing	171
Apologizing	1
Acknowledging	1
Accepting	4
Rejecting	7
<b>Argument structure</b>	
Default inference	930

Default conflict	271
Default rephrase	444

The illocutionary forces used for the analyses of dialogues with IAT are mainly derived from Speech Act Theory (Searle and Vanderveken, 1985). Below are given indications about our definition of the illocutionary forces presented in Table 1. Most of these illocutionary forces have been defined in (Budzynska et al., 2016).

**Asserting (A)** A speaker *S* is asserting *p* to communicate his opinion on *p*. It does not imply that *S* really believes *p*: it is rather a public declaration to which the speaker can be held. A speaker is **Ironic**

**Asserting (IA)** *p* to communicate her opinion on *p* by stating the contrary of it.

**Expressing (E)** A speaker is expressing *p* to communicate her feelings or emotions about *p*.

**Offering (O)** A speaker is offering *p* to make an offer that her interlocutor can accept or reject.

**Questioning (Q)** *S* is questioning whether *p* when *S* formulates *p* as an interrogative sentence of the form: “Is/Isn’t *p* the case?”. Four types of questions are distinguished in mediation: **Pure Questioning (PQ)**, **Assertive Questioning (AQ)**, **Rhetorical Questioning (RQ)** and **Directive Questioning (DQ)**. In the case of PQ, *S* is asking for the hearer *H*’s opinion on *p*: whether *H* believes *p*. AQ and RQ, in contrast, carry some degree of assertive force. For AQ, *S* does not only seeks *H*’s opinion on *p*, but also indirectly publicly declares his own opinion on *p*. This illocutionary force is typically strongly signalled by linguistic cues such as ‘Isn’t it the case that...’ or ‘Can we agree that...’. For RQ, *S* is grammatically stating a question, but in fact he just conveys that he does (or does not) believe *p* and does not wait for *H* to answer the question. With DQ, a speaker poses a question that has to be taken as an instruction, or something that has to be done by the hearer.

**Challenging (Ch)** When S is challenging  $p$ , S is seeking (asking about) the grounds for H's opinion on  $p$ . Challenges are a dialogical mechanism for triggering argumentation. For instance, with an utterance of the type "Why  $p$ ?" S asks about the reasons for believing  $p$ . A hearer who provides a reason  $q$  results in an argument " $p$  since  $q$ " by means of the dialogue. Similarly to questions, challenges form a continuum from **Pure Challenging (PCh)** through **Assertive Challenging (ACh)** to **Rhetorical Challenging (RCh)**.

**Popular Conceding (PCn)** Through popular conceding, S communicates some sort of general knowledge which is taken to be obvious and as such does not require to be defended (i.e. it does not place a burden of proof on S). PCn is often introduced to the discussion in order to partly agree with the opponent using some generally accepted truths, but at the same time to prepare grounds for expressing disagreement in the next statement. This way, S shows that the real disagreement in the discussion lies elsewhere.

**Arguing (Arg)** S is arguing when he defends a standpoint i.e. when at least one premise is given to a conclusion. This illocutionary force can be signalled by linguistic cues such as "therefore" and "because", however, these indicators rarely occur in spoken natural language. Arguing takes a relation of inference as content.

**Explaining (Ex)** S is explaining when she expresses a statement  $q$  which supports a proposition  $p$ .

**Restating (R)** S is restating when she utters a proposition  $q$  which paraphrases or repeats a proposition  $p$ . The linguistic surface of the proposition  $q$  must be similar or equivalent to  $p$ .

**Default illocuting (DI)** S is default illocuting when she answers a pure question.

**Agreeing (Agr)** is used for expressing a positive reaction, i.e. when the speaker S declares to share the opinion of his opponent. This can take the basic form of positive reactions such as 'Yes', 'Indeed', 'Most definitely', 'Sure', but may as well be a complete sentence. Agreeing takes as content a proposition earlier uttered.



**Disagreeing (Disagr)** is used for expressing a negative reaction, i.e. when S declares not to share the opponent's opinion. This can take the form of utterances which have similar meaning to 'No' (e.g. 'I'm not saying that', 'Actually, that's not correct', 'Definitely not', 'No it's not') or it can be an utterance with a complete propositional content. This illocutionary force takes a relation of conflict as content.

**Apologizing (Apol)** S is apologizing when she positively reacts to an expression.

**Accepting (Acc)** S is accepting when she positively responds to an offer.

**Rejecting (Rej)** S is rejecting when she negatively responds to an offer.

### *The verb 'to say'*

Shallow statistical analyses have been carried out on the DMC and have shown the ubiquity of speech verbs. Of them, SAY caught our attention because of its frequency and the fact that all speakers in our corpus use it several times. Out of the 3,093 different words found in the corpus SAY appears in the eighth position in terms of frequency of verbs (339 occurrences), after BE, DO, KNOW, THINK etc., and is the most frequent discourse verb, much more than TELL which is in the second place with 82 occurrences. As mentioned already, the verb 'to say' may be considered as one of the most typical examples of meta-talk: it is clear that when a speaker uses the verb 'to say', she is referring to an event that has occurred, occurs or will occur in the discourse itself. However, SAY is not itself a speech act verb, which makes it hard to determine the speaker's intentions. As summarised in (Proost, 2009), SAY, in contrast with CLAIM, PROMISE or THREATEN which are more specific, does not explicitly give information as to the speaker's attitude. When a speaker states "I will explain the rules of the game to you in a second", we know that she wants to, and will, provide explanations and guidance to her interlocutor; however, if she claims "I'm saying that I'm leaving", we cannot know, a priori, what her intention is: is she just informing, or threatening her audience? Is she rewording a previous utterance? The verb SAY,

therefore, does not say anything about the speaker's aim before an analysis of the broader context is carried out.

In the literature (in sociolinguistics in particular), SAY is mainly studied within cases of (self-)reported speech, to explore stance taking or its role as an extra-dialogical particle. In (Clift, 2006) and (Rubin Damari, 2010), reported speech is referred to as constructed dialogue. In (Schiffrin, 1980), Schiffrin calls reported speech 'renewal brackets' and considers that, when they are applied to someone else's talk (i.e. not the speaker's), they have an evaluative function. For the present work, we searched for the verb 'to say' in its different variants, and only kept occurrences with first and second person singular pronouns, and in the present and past tenses. We then discarded uses in the future tense and the conditional. In total, SAY with first and second singular pronouns and in the present and past tenses represents 28% of all occurrences of SAY. Table 2 summarizes the uses of SAY in DMC that have been kept for the present work: simple present, present progressive, simple past, past progressive, present perfect, present perfect continuous and progressive, past perfect, past perfect continuous and progressive. Future and conditional are not taken into account, but reported speech (in present or past tenses) is considered.

**Table 2.** Uses of SAY in DMC.

Generic expression	Variants	Occurrences
I said	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- I said</li> <li>- I was saying</li> <li>- like I said</li> <li>- I didn't say</li> <li>- I've said</li> <li>- as I said</li> </ul>	25
	- you were saying	

you said	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- you said</li> <li>-you had said</li> <li>- as you said</li> <li>- like you said</li> <li>- you just said</li> </ul>	17
I say	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- I'm saying</li> <li>- what I'm saying</li> <li>- as I say</li> <li>- I'm not saying</li> <li>- when I say</li> <li>- that's not what I say</li> </ul>	23
you say	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- you're saying</li> <li>- as you say</li> <li>- you're not saying</li> <li>- you say</li> <li>- what you're saying</li> <li>- are you saying</li> <li>- why don't you say</li> <li>- when you say</li> </ul>	29

Statistics also reveal that Mediators use SAY less than parties: out of the 94 occurrences considered, 37 are uttered by a mediator. Note, however, that the majority of mediators' uses are with YOU as pronoun subject: mediators use "I say" or "I said" only seven times. These numbers align with the idea of neutrality of mediators: parties' positions are more important than mediators'.

As a comparison, the same statistical analysis has been carried out on a sample of a corpus of radio debates – the Moral Maze – of similar size (23,930 words against 23,979 for the DMC)<sup>4</sup>. The Moral Maze has been the reference corpus for the study of argumentative dialogues in works such as (Budzynska et al., 2014; Budzynska et al., 2016). In the Moral Maze, a BBC Radio 4 programme<sup>5</sup>, a moderator and four panellists discuss current economical and societal issues with three or four witnesses. Although the number of speakers is higher than in mediation, the dialogical setting is close to mediation sessions: the moderator asks questions and proposes new issues to be tackled, and panellists and witnesses are the ones who argue and actually discuss the issues. This corpus presents us with other characteristics similar to mediation: dialogues are slightly constrained; they are very dynamic (turns rarely exceed 6 locutions in both contexts) and references to what happens or has happened in the discussion are also common (e.g. the last 10 minutes of a one-hour long Moral Maze episode are devoted to summarizing participants in the debate's points of view). Results of the statistical analysis confirms that SAY is very common in mediation dialogues: in total, SAY used with 'I' and 'you' in the past and present tenses appears 94 times in mediation against only 33 times in Moral Maze. This shows that the meta-discourse element SAY has a particularly important place in mediation, which represents therefore an ideal context for the current investigation.

### **Functions of SAY in mediation discourse**

In this section, the argumentative functions of SAY in mediation discourse that IAT allowed discovering are presented. Argumentative function is understood here in a broad sense: arguing of course is considered, but aspects of argumentation that are typical in dialogical discourse are also taken into

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<sup>4</sup> See the following corpora: [corpora.aifdb.org/britishempire](http://corpora.aifdb.org/britishempire), [corpora.aifdb.org/problem](http://corpora.aifdb.org/problem) and [corpora.aifdb.org/bankingsystem](http://corpora.aifdb.org/bankingsystem)

<sup>5</sup> For more details, see the official website: [bbc.co.uk/programmes/b006qk11](http://bbc.co.uk/programmes/b006qk11)

account. Agreeing, disagreeing, arguing and restating claims are dynamics proper to argumentative discourse. The following subsections present the three functions played by SAY as meta-discourse in mediation dialogues, that is, conveying agreement and disagreement, arguing and restating.

### *Agreeing and disagreeing*

A first function played by the meta-talk element SAY which was discovered during corpus analyses is to convey agreement and disagreement. Let's first consider Example 3.

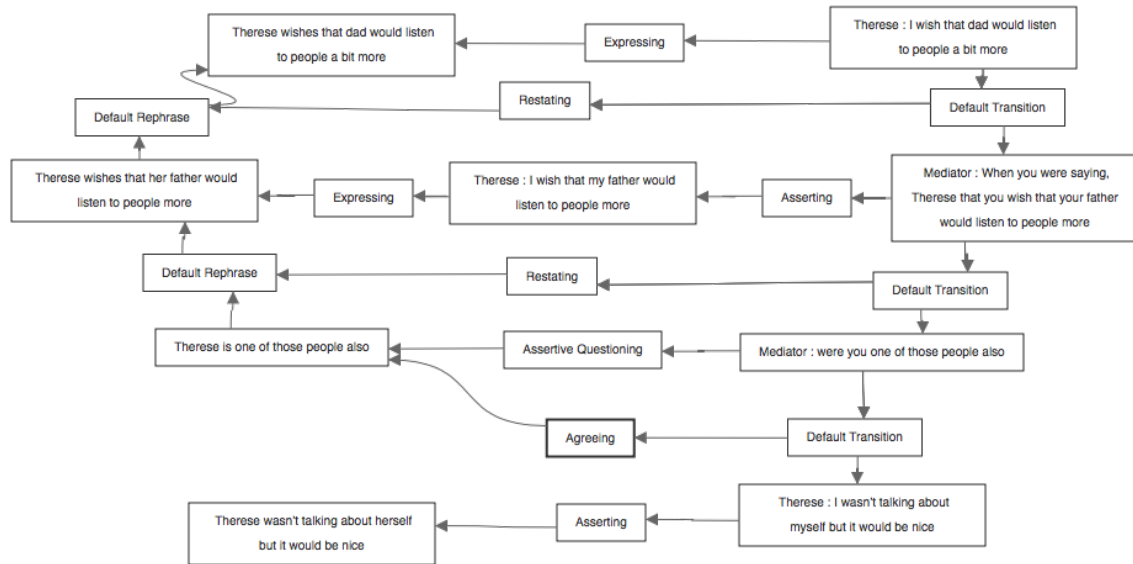
(4) a. Therese: *I wish that dad would listen to people a bit more.*

b. [. . .]

c. Mediator: ***When you were saying***, Therese that you wish that your father would listen to people more, were you one of those people also?

d. Therese: *I wasn't talking about myself but it would be nice.*

In this excerpt, taken from a mediation involving a father and his daughter, with the meta-talk "when you were saying", the mediator asks Therese if what she claimed implied something else (if she is part of the people that her father should listen more). The IAT analysis is given in Figure 2.



**Figure 2.** IAT analysis of Ex. 4, argument map #10279

We can see that at turn 4c, SAY is used to repeat Therese's claim: the mediator first reports her words and then asks an assertive question that rephrases Therese's claim: her dad should listen to people more and she is one of these people<sup>6</sup>. Therese answering "it would be nice" shows that she agrees with the content of the mediator's question. The mediator has thus managed to trigger the disputant's agreement without yet having claimed anything: because it is under the form of an assertive question, his move does not jeopardize his neutrality, however it allows for requesting a clarification of the disputant's viewpoint. In the end, he has not stated anything but has subtly pushed the party to agree with a proposition, as if she was the one who made such a point. This Figure shows the mediator's strategy: he used the propositional content of the party's claim and then rephrased the propositional content of the reported speech under the form of a question. SAY here is not directly used to agree or disagree, however it is used to report a locution that is then rephrased so that the mediator can trigger the party's agreement. These dynamics

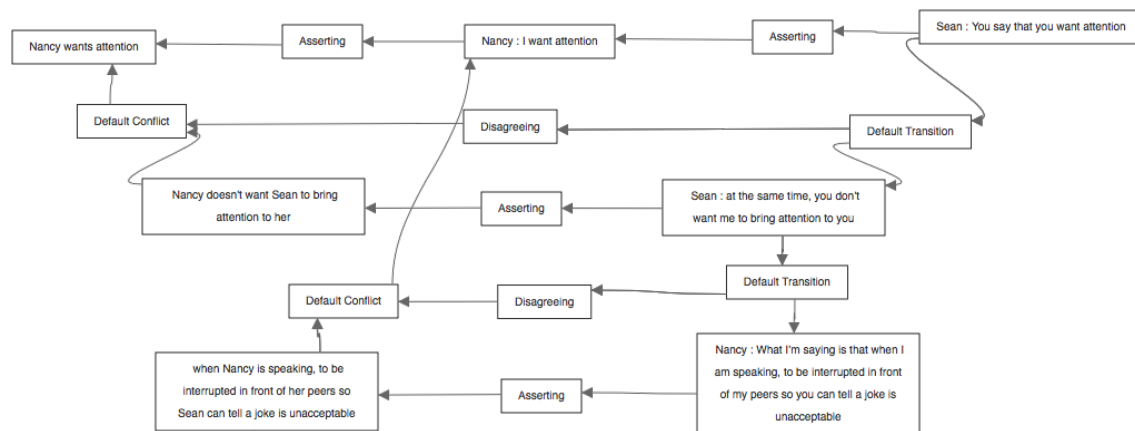
<sup>6</sup> The analysis of this example contains two Restating nodes: Section *Restating* below provides a deeper account of these dynamics.

reveal an argumentative strategy: using ‘you said’ to report a party’s speech and restating the propositional content with a question, has allowed the mediator to trigger the party’s agreement.

(5) a. Sean: ***You say that** you want attention, but, at the same time, you don’t want me to bring attention to you.*

b. Nancy Butler: ***What I’m saying** is that when I am speaking, to be interrupted in front of my peers so you can tell a joke is unacceptable.*

Example 5 captures the exchange between two disputants, Sean and his colleague Nancy. Both speakers use the meta-talk SAY: “you say” and “what I’m saying”. The analysis is given in Figure 3.



**Figure 3.** IAT analysis of Ex. 5, argument map #9928.

As shown by the IAT analysis, by using “you say”, Sean is reporting Nancy’s speech. The top middle box represents this reported speech; what Sean is doing is saying that Nancy says she wants attention. Then, Sean shows that he disagrees with the fact that she wants attention by counter-claiming that she does not

want him to bring attention to her: see the Default Conflict node between the first two turns. In response, Nancy also uses the meta-talk SAY, however, the pronoun subject here is ‘I’, meaning that she refers to her position, not her opponent’s as Sean did in the previous move. The analysis shows that she disagrees with Sean, or more precisely with the content of Sean’s reporting speech. This time the Default Conflict node targets another type of content: the reported speech. Indeed, what Nancy is doing is disagreeing that she said that she wants attention; this does not mean however that her wanting attention is not the case, but her saying such a thing definitely is not. This example and the analysis show that reporting someone’s talk is convenient for a speaker to show that he disagrees with an opponent, as Sean did in turn 5a, however he took the risk that his co-discussant denies having said what he reported. Figure 3 shows two different strategies. Sean used the propositional content of a reported speech to show his disagreement. His strategy, as in Example 4, is therefore argumentative. On the contrary, his opponent used the content of the reported speech (i.e. a reported locution) to show that she disagrees: her strategy is then dialogical.

(6) a. Mediator: *I can see **what you’re also saying** too Ben that uh, I think you resent Gerry dictating to you what you should do on your visitation.*

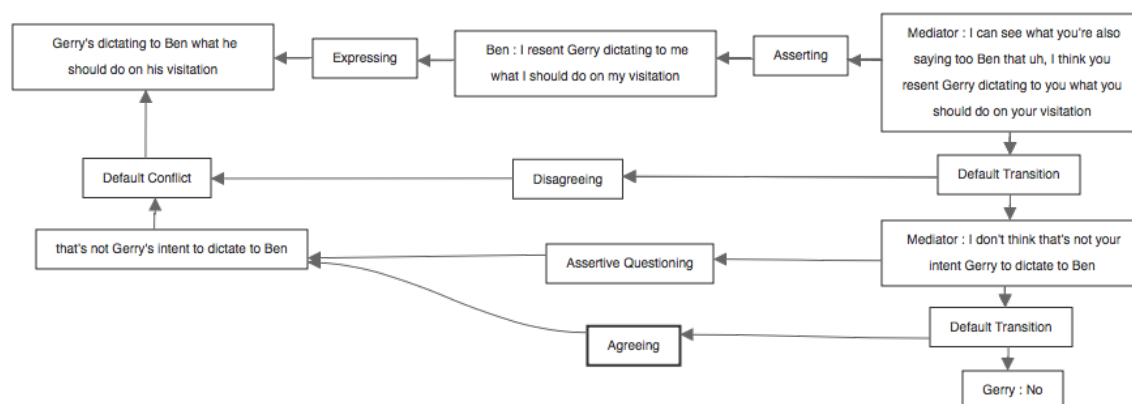
b. [. . .]

c. Mediator: *I don’t think that’s not your intent Gerry to dictate to Ben?*

d. Gerry: *No.*

In Example 6, taken from a mediation where a divorcing couple tries to find arrangements for their child’s custody, the mediator uses the expression “you’re saying” to report Ben’s words. He then asks Gerry whether what Ben thinks – or at least what he thinks Ben said – is the case, to which Gerry answers negatively. The analysis of the example is given in Figure 4.





**Figure 4.** IAT analysis of Ex. 6, argument map # 9110.

The neutrality of the mediator cannot, a priori, be questioned: he is not taking a stand because he reports a party's speech and then asks a question to the other party. However, the analysis demonstrates that the question allows him to disagree, although not directly with a party but with the proposition of the reported speech. Moreover, this question triggers the other party's agreement. The mediator has thus managed to clarify the parties' positions: he used Ben's words to verify if his opponent agreed with him. Reporting one party's words and assertive questioning permitted him to counter-argue as well as to look for the other party's point of view. Here again, the mediator's strategy is argumentative: he used the propositional content of a reported speech to trigger the party's agreement.

Examples 4 to 6 have shown that using the meta-talk expression SAY in various forms allows speakers to show or to trigger (dis-)agreement. In Example 4, the mediator used SAY to report a party's claim and then questioned the same party in search for her agreement. The analysis has shown that the dynamics happen at the level of the argument structure, eliciting an argumentative strategy. In the second example, the parties both used SAY, however, their strategies were different: Sean gave a counter-argument to what Nancy (may have) said, while she disagreed on having said such a thing. While Sean's strategy happened

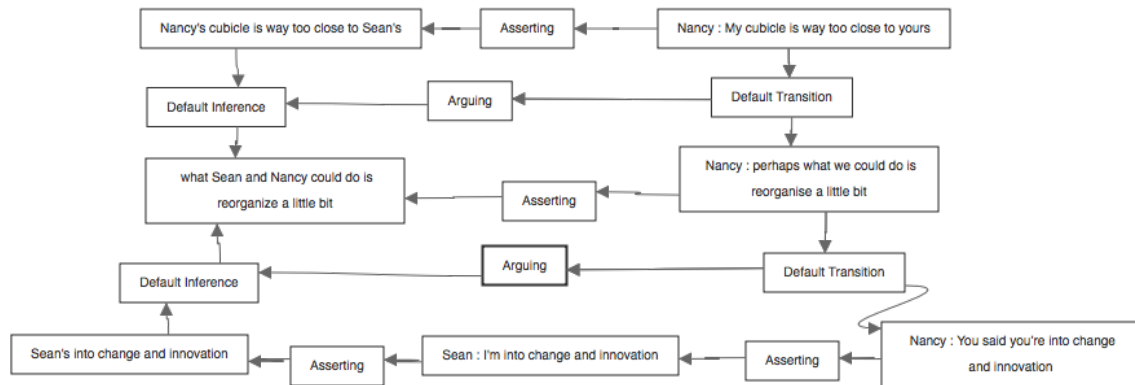
at the argument structure level, Nancy's one is dialogical since her disagreement targets a reported locution. In Example 6, finally, the mediator used SAY to subtly disagree with a party (he disagreed with the propositional content of the reported speech) and then managed to show that the other party agrees with him. Both strategies have been shown to happen on the argument structure level, which shows that this strategy was argumentative rather than dialogical.

### *Arguing*

Arguing is the second function of SAY that has been identified. Arguing is understood here in the sense of giving support(s) to a main claim (Toulmin, 2003). We will show here how argumentation is performed when speakers use the meta-talk verb 'to say'.

(7) a. Nancy Butler: *My cubicle is way too close to yours, and perhaps what we could do is reorganise a little bit. **You said** you're into change and innovation.*

Example 7 is taken from a workplace mediation; in this excerpt, a party, Nancy, is negotiating with her co-worker and co-disputant: they do not get on well so she proposes they reorganize the office so that their cubicles are not so close. Nancy uses the meta-talk element "you said" to refer to what the other disputant (supposedly) mentioned earlier on in the mediation. The analysis of the example is given in Figure 5.

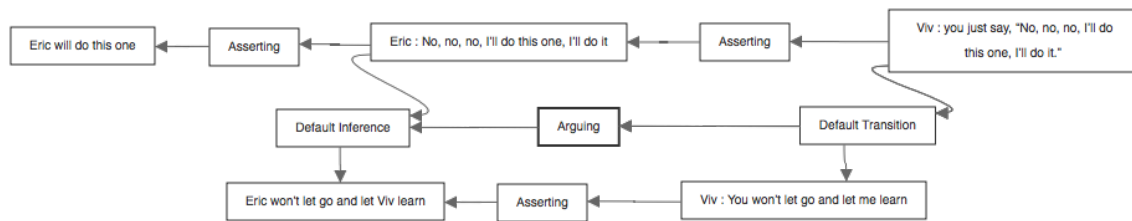


**Figure 5.** IAT analysis of Ex. 7, argument map # 9242.

The analysis shows that Nancy is arguing to have the organization of cubicles changed: Sean's and her cubicles are too close therefore they should organise them differently. She further supports her claim by reporting Sean's words ("you said you're into change and innovation"). The content of the reported speech (i.e. the proposition which Nancy attributes to Sean) allows her to further argue: Sean is into change and innovation therefore they should reorganize the cubicles (see the Arguing node at the bottom). Nancy has thus built her own argument with two different propositions: her own (cubicles are too close) and Sean's, via reported speech. Nancy's strategy is argumentative: she uses the propositional content of her opponent's claim to infer her own conclusion. Let's consider another example where a speaker uses the meta-talk SAY and argues:

(8) a. Viv: *you just say*, "No, no, no, I'll do this one (the project), I'll do it." You won't let go and let me learn.

Example 8, taken from another workplace mock-mediation contains the meta-talk element “you say”: the party, Viv, reports what her boss answered when she proposed to take care of a new project. The IAT analysis of this excerpt is presented in Figure 6.



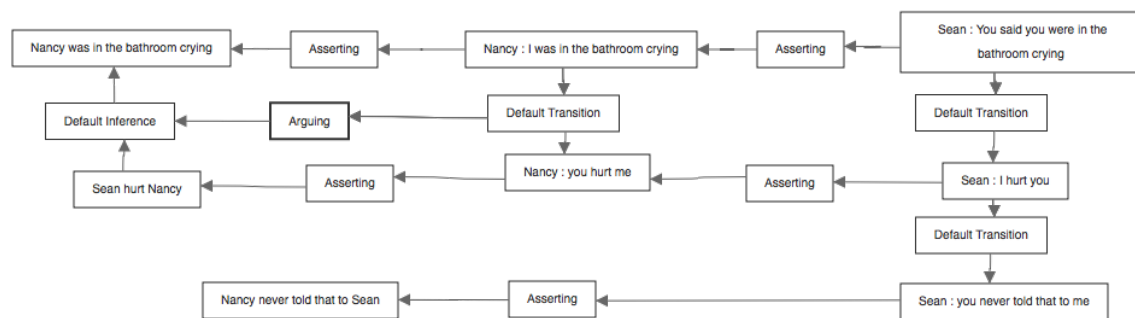
**Figure 6.** IAT analysis of Ex. 8, argument map #9824.

In this figure as well, we can see that the speaker is arguing and uses reported speech; however, this time, the speaker does not use the proposition of the reported speech but the reported speech itself to create an argument. Viv’s claim that Eric never lets go and let her learn is not supported by the propositional content of Eric’s (supposed) answer, rather the answer in itself proves (according to Viv) that he never lets her handle any project. Although this excerpt does not present a dialogue, since only Viv is talking, Viv’s strategy is dialogical: she uses a reported locution, that is Eric’s (supposed) locution, to draw a conclusion. In other words, she is creating a dialogue -- which may not have happened -- which supports her strategy. Let’s now take a third example where a speaker argues and uses SAY.

(9) a. Sean McNeil: ***You said** you were in the bathroom crying because I hurt you, but you never told that to me.*

This example also contains the meta-talk element SAY. In this excerpt, the party, Sean, reports something that his colleague said earlier during the mediation and claims that she has never said this to him before.

The IAT analysis is given in Figure 7.



**Figure 7.** IAT analysis of Ex. 9, argument map # 9243.

The Figure contains an Arguing node but, contrary to the previous examples, it appears that the speaker is not the one arguing: see the Transition node that links the reported speeches. What the speaker is doing is reconstructing an argument which is not his but his opponent's. He is not saying that Nancy was crying because he hurt her but that Nancy said that she was crying because he hurt her. The Arguing node that is anchored in the Transition node linking the reported speeches shows that the argument is not created by the on-going conversation but that it happened in the past and was his co-disputant's. This dynamics can be compared to what happens with reported speech: while with reported speech a speaker reports her own or someone else's words, what the speaker (Sean) is doing here, in addition to reporting Nancy's words, is reporting her argument i.e. reporting on the argument that someone had or made. This strategy is neither argumentative, nor dialogical because the speaker is not arguing at all, he only reports an argument, which is not even his; the absence of illocutionary connection anchored in the transition nodes on the right-hand side of the analysis shows that the speaker has no intention other than reconstructing an argument.

Examples 7 to 9 show that by using the verb ‘to say’ speakers can construct arguments: to support their claims they can use some else’s words as in Example 8 or propositions as in Example 7, and they can also reconstruct arguments that happened in the past but are not necessarily theirs, as in Example 9. While the first analysis highlights an argumentative strategy and the following one shows that the speaker argue by deploying a dialogical strategy, the third example shows that the speaker is reconstructing a dynamics, in the same way that the IAT analyses reconstruct the argument and dialogical structures.

### *Restating*

Restating has been identified as being the third function of SAY. In (Konat et al., 2016), the authors explain that a relation that holds between two propositional contents that have a different linguistic surface is a *rephrase*. They also demonstrate that the rephrase relation has different functions: rephrase can be used to repeat a premise and make an argument look stronger than it really is, or to have a greater impact on the audience (e.g. by repeating the same thing several time, the speaker makes sure the hearer will remember her claim). In a dialogue, speakers can rephrase their own statements as well as others’, and in IAT, this is represented via the illocutionary connection Restating that targets Default Rephrase nodes. Our corpus analyses have shown that restating is often related to uses of SAY, and, as we will see, this can have several aims, in particular in mediation.

- (10) a. Eric: *I’m genuinely confused about what Viv is accusing me of.*  
 b. George: *Okay. All right. So would you be happy just to carry on Viv, would you happy if Eric used that as a starting point for a couple of minutes to explain how he thinks and how he feels? And then you’d have the same opportunity.*  
 c. Viv: *Yes, that’s fine by me.*

d. George: *Are you sure?*

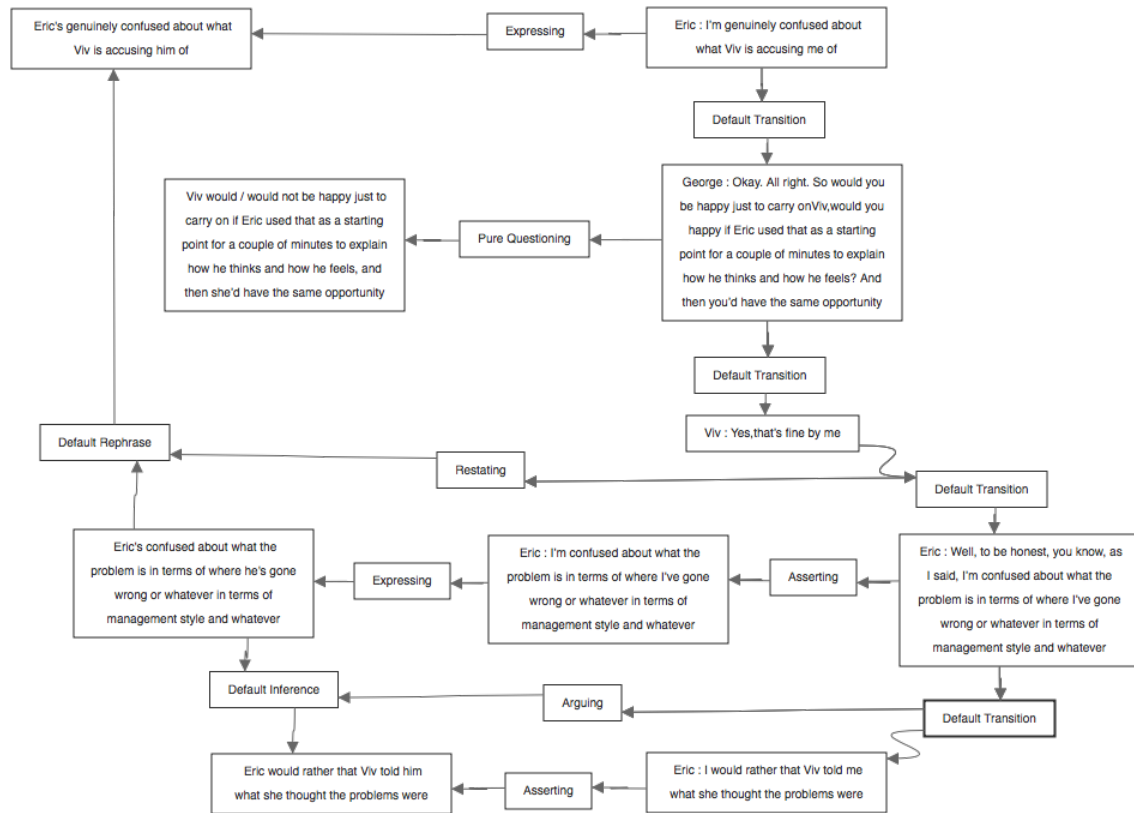
e. Viv: *Yes, yes.*

f. Mildred: *It might be worth adding, George, just at this moment, when you are speaking, if we could ask the other party just to listen and listen without interrupting and then, of course, you get the opportunity to do the same. I would ask you, Eric, when Viv's speaking to do the same. Is that all right with you?*

g. Eric: *Well, to be honest, you know, **as I said**, I'm confused about what the problem is in terms of where I've gone wrong or whatever in terms of management style and whatever and so I would rather that Viv told me what she thought the problems were and then I can try and understand what it's all about, basically.*

h. George: *Okay.*

This example, which involves Viv and her boss Eric, and two mediators – George and Mildred –, captures the beginning of a mediation session where the mediators asked the parties to give their point of view regarding the reason for their presence. Eric answers that he is unsure (Viv initiated the mediation) so George proposes him to answer first. But Eric responds, using the meta-talk element “as I said”, that he is so confused that he would rather Viv to start. Let's analyse turns 10a to 10c and turn 10g.



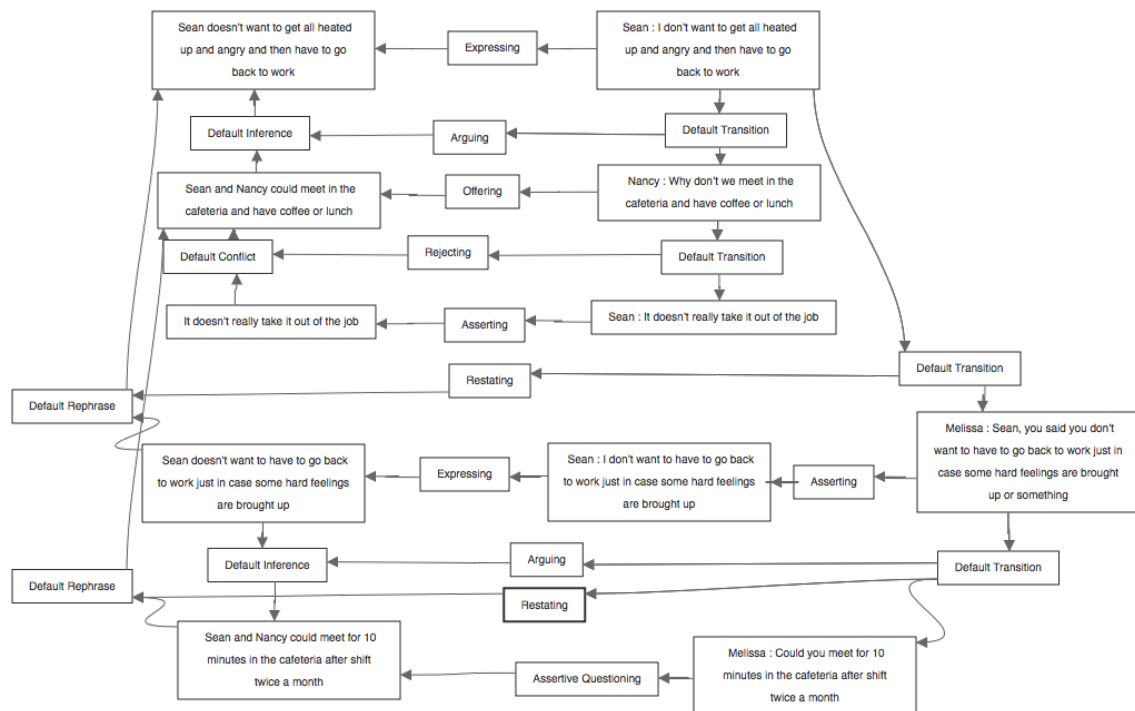
**Figure 8.** IAT analysis of Ex. 10, argument map # 9291.

The IAT analysis shows that with “as I said” in turn 10g, Eric is reporting his own words: see the Default Rephrase node that links this proposition to the one on top of Figure 8. Both utterances are semantically similar however, through the restatement Eric clarifies his point of view: he is confused therefore he does not want to be the first in answering the mediators and would prefer Viv to start. He has therefore constructed an argument (see the Arguing node at the bottom) by reformulating his own claim. The analysis shows that the Eric has an argumentative strategy: he uses SAY to report his own words with a slightly different linguistic surface which later on allows him to re-use his own proposition to construct an argument. Example 11 that follows presents a similar situation.



- (11) a. Sean McNeil *I don't want to get all heated up and angry and then have to go back to work. Maybe what we should do is have a drink together.*
- b. Nancy Butler: *I don't want to go out with you. I don't want to have a drink with you. You're my supervisor.*
- c. Sean McNeil: *I'm not dating you. I'm trying to find a casual place which is neutral.*
- d. Nancy Butler: *Why don't we meet in the cafeteria and have coffee or lunch?*
- e. Sean McNeil: *It doesn't really take it out of the job.*
- f. Melissa Myer: *Sean, **you said** you don't want to have to go back to work just in case some hard feelings are brought up or something. Could you meet for 10 minutes in the cafeteria after shift twice a month?*
- g. Sean McNeil: *If it's necessary.*

In Example 11 Sean and Nancy, the parties, try to find a compromise about where to meet and discuss their work problems. Sean proposes to go and have a drink but this offer does not please his co-disputant who proposes to go to the cafeteria. Sean rejects this proposal, so the mediator, Melissa, reacts in turn 11f. In this turn, she uses the meta-talk element “you said”. Let's analyse turns 11a and 11d to 11f.



**Figure 9.** IAT analysis of Ex. 11, argument map # 9244.

The analysis shows that after Sean claimed that he does not want to go back to work after a heated conversation, Nancy offers to go to the cafeteria to discuss their problems. The mediator then restates Sean's statement: see the Default Rephrase node that indicates that Melissa reporting Sean's speech is restating Sean's proposition. Melissa then uses this to build an argument: Nancy's offer of going to the cafeteria coupled with Sean not wanting to go back to work in case "hard feelings are brought up" support Melissa's statement that they could meet in the cafeteria after work. The Restating node indicates that the mediator has reused the party's previous claim so that she can use it to build her own argument. Note also that Melissa uses an assertive question: the conclusion of her argument is under the form of a question but carries an assertive force as well. This technique is common in mediation: the interrogative form does not undermine the mediator's neutrality since it is only a question she is asking to parties, nevertheless the

context shows that she manages to subtly argue thanks to the restatement of a party's claim and the use of the other party's offer. The mediator has therefore deployed an argumentative strategy because she used the proposition of a party and the propositional content of a reported speech to draw a conclusion.

(12) a. Sean McNeil: *What happens if (Nancy) goes back and tells the company about what we did and I didn't give her permission?*

b. Melissa Myer: *That's something that we can talk about. If we get towards an agreement, we can talk about that. **Are you saying** that you want what is said in here at this point to remain confidential to this room?*

In this excerpt, Sean is asking the mediators about what will happen if his co-disputant tells their superiors about what occurred during the mediation process. The mediator first says that they will talk about this at the end of the session but then asks Sean whether he means that he does not want Nancy to tell the superiors. The IAT analysis is given in Figure 10.

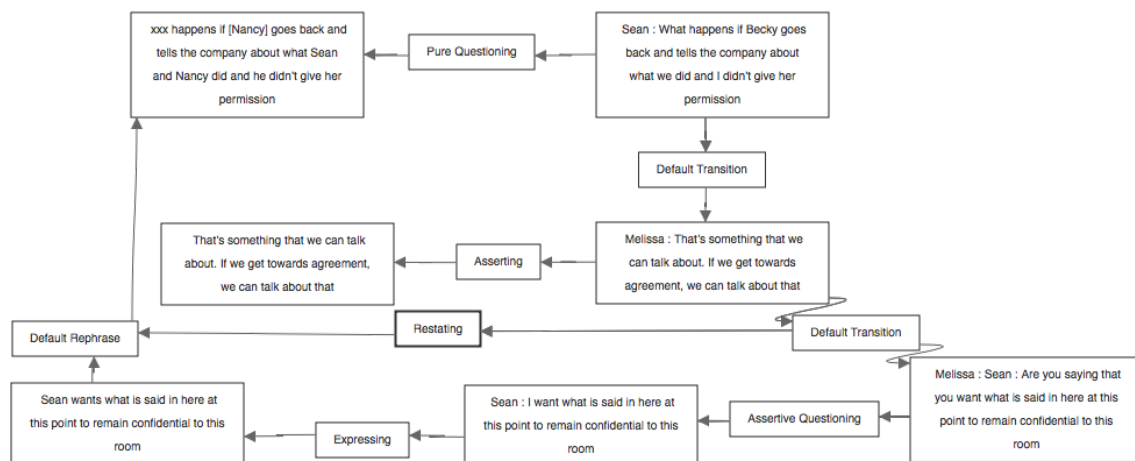


Figure 10. IAT analysis of Ex. 12, Argument map # 9923.

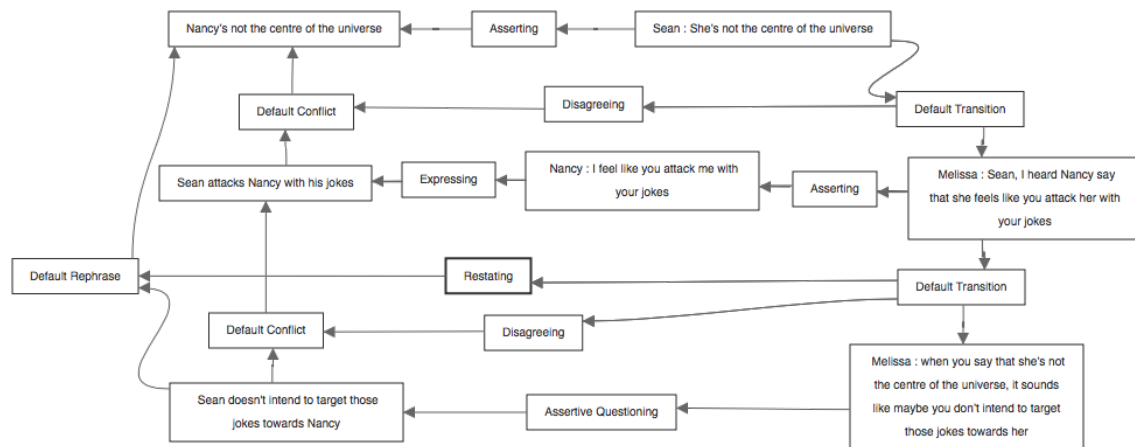
The analysis shows two important things: when Melissa uses the meta-talk element SAY in the interrogative form (“Are you saying”) she is assertive questioning (i.e. she is looking for the interlocutor’s (dis-)agreement); what she is doing is reporting Sean’s speech via the restatement of his question: she reframes his question into a different illocution. Indeed, see that Sean’s locution was a question, but the reported speech anchors an expressing node. This is a common mediation technique: to clarify parties’ positions, mediators ask questions (as seen with Example 11) but also reframe their positions, two tactics that Melissa is doing with her simple question “Are you saying (. . .)”. This strategy takes place at the argument structure and illocutionary levels, which shows that it is both an argumentative and a rhetorical strategy.

(13) a. Sean McNeil: *She’s not the centre of the universe. I have 45 people in my department and she’s the only person that’s a thorn in my backside.*

b. Melissa Myer: *Sean, I heard **Nancy say that** she feels like you attack her with your jokes, and when **you say that** she’s not the centre of the universe, it sounds like maybe you don’t intend to target those jokes towards her?*

c. Sean McNeil: *I make jokes towards myself.*

In this example, the mediator uses SAY twice: to talk about what Nancy and then Sean said. The analysis is presented in Figure 11.



**Figure 11.** IAT analysis of Ex. 13, argument map # 9925.

This analysis shows that the mediator is restating Sean's claim and is reporting Nancy's in order to show that she disagrees. She first reports Nancy's claim (Sean directs his jokes towards her) to emphasize the fact that Nancy does not agree with Sean's statement, but she then restates Sean's claim with an assertive question to finally show that Nancy should not disagree because what Sean means is different. See that, again, the disagreement is subtle and does not undermine Melissa's neutrality: the conflicts are not directly targeting the parties' propositions. The first one comes from the proposition of a reported speech and the second one comes from the proposition of a question, which shows that the mediator has used an argumentative strategy.

Examples 10 to 13 have shown that SAY also allows restating locutions. In the first example, Eric, rephrased his own words to be able to explain his position after the mediators and Viv misunderstood him. In Example 11, the mediator used a disputant's proposition and rephrased the other's to build her own argument: Sean and Nancy do not agree but a compromise between their propositions is possible. The mediator rephrases their proposition and concludes that together the propositions lead to a natural compromise that she presents under the form of a question to check if parties agree. In Example 12, the

mediator rephrased a party's question to elicit his point of view: while the party was only asking a question, the mediator reframed his proposition into an expressive. In the last example, the mediator rephrased a party's proposition after reporting the other party's claim. She showed that parties disagree, however she also highlighted a misunderstanding between them: if Sean said that Nancy is not the centre of the universe, he cannot be directing his jokes towards her, therefore Nancy should not take these jokes personally. We have seen that the restating function of the meta-talk SAY plays a role at the argumentative, dialogical and rhetorical levels.

## **Discussion and conclusion**

Research into mediation discourse has demonstrated that mediators' role is paradoxical: as third-neutrals they cannot take a stand on a party and her standpoints, however they must make sure that disputants argue efficiently so that they quickly manage to resolve their conflict (Greco Morasso, 2011). They are therefore in charge of the argument but cannot argue themselves. They cannot argue for or against a solution but can recommend ways to broach issues. Also, they must deploy strategies whenever discussions derail and disputants face an impasse (Aakhus, 2003). Their contributions are therefore giving shape and direction to the dialogue between disputants. This is why it is so important to understand the ways in which mediators make reference to the discussions in which they are involved, and therefore use meta-discourse.

In (Janier and Reed, 2015, Janier et al., 2014a, Janier et al., 2015), it was shown that IAT's fine-grained analyses of mediation dialogues offer a unique understanding of the connection between parties' arguments, mediators' strategies and dialogical argumentative activity. In this paper, we applied IAT to mediation dialogues where the verb 'to say' was used in the present or past tense and with 'I' or 'you' as pronoun subjects, i.e. when reference to the discourse and its participants are made. We have shown that the verb 'to say' is a meta-discursive element that plays a crucial role in mediation interactions. While it

often relates to reported-speech, such as “you say that you want attention”, it also appears in other contexts, e.g. when a speaker wants to make sure he understood his interlocutor such as in “Are you saying that you want what is said in here at this point to remain confidential”. Three functions of SAY as meta-talk have been demonstrated. When a speaker uses SAY to refer to something that was said in the discussion, it can be to agree, disagree (or trigger agreement or disagreement), to (re)build arguments or to restate positions. It has also been shown that these functions play a role in speakers’ strategies. While most of the uses of SAY allow speakers to deploy argumentative strategies (visible in IAT analyses on the left-hand side of argument maps), dialogical and rhetorical strategies have also been evidenced (dialogical strategies make use of reported locutions, while rhetorical strategies reframe the illocutionary structure of the dialogues). Mauranen emphasised that strategies and manoeuvres in discourse largely rely on the reflexivity of language, that is, on meta-discourse (Mauranen, 2010). The findings reported here bring new information as to the functions played by meta-discourse and the discursive strategies of speakers who use it.

The results established here lay a foundation for future studies of mediation discourse. As part of future work, the next step will be to verify if such uses of meta-discourse play a role in with the outcome of mediation. The question to be answered is: do uses of SAY effectively serve the resolution of the conflict? In other words, are mediations more efficient (i.e. effectively lead to a resolution of the conflict) when speakers, and mediators in particular, use SAY a lot? Moreover, a wider range of meta-talk elements must be accounted for in mediation. This paper focused on SAY as meta-discourse, however, meta-talk is apparent in mediation through other verbs and expressions. The goal would be to verify whether more functions of meta-discourse in argumentative dialogues can be identified.

To conclude, the current paper is a first step towards an account of the functions of meta-talk in mediation, and in argumentative dialogues in general. Three different functions have been highlighted

and related to argumentative, dialogical and rhetorical strategies of speakers. Additional meta-talk elements must be investigated to discover their respective functions and to explore whether the use of meta-discourse contributes to a more efficient resolution of a conflict. Nevertheless, this paper has laid the foundations towards a taxonomy for meta-discourse in the context of argumentation in dialogues. We have shown that a single meta-discursive element plays different functions that help capture the argumentative, dialogical and rhetorical strategies of speakers. These findings are essential to grasp the subtleties of mediation discourse, in particular the strategies of mediators who lead the discussion between disputants and manage their arguments while preserving their own neutrality at the same time.

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